SCAPEGOATS

THIRTEEN VICTIMS OF MILITARY INJUSTICE

MICHAEL SCOTT

Foreword by Magnus Linklater

ONE

Captain Jahleel Brenton Carey

The Killing of the Prince Imperial

June 1879

As scapegoats go, Captain Carey's story is arguably the prime example of how blame can be pushed down from above onto one who did not deserve it.

If Shakespeare had been alive in 1879, he would surely have written *The Tragedy of the Prince Imperial.* The tale had all the components he loved so much: high-born players, passion, battle, courage, death, failure and cover-up. He would not have had to invent anything, although he might have written the ending in brighter colours.

Eighty years later, officer cadets in the Sovereign's Company at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, looking out of the window could see a statue of the Prince Imperial (see plate III) gazing out over the playing fields and lake. With the indolence and arrogance of youth, they paid it little attention except on high days and holidays when the statue was adorned with inappropriate articles or daubed with paint. They knew little of the Prince and cared even less. A study of the Anglo-Zulu War was usually confined to Stanley Baker's and Michael Caine's parts as Chard and Bromhead winning VCs at Rorke's Drift in the film *Zulu*.

So why the statue of this Frenchman? What was he doing in the British Army not that long after the French, the old enemy, had been so soundly beaten in 1815 and, more recently, by the Prussians? How and why had he met his end in a relatively unknown war a long way from home? What military incompetence and social unease had led to his death – and where had the blame been subsequently spread to absolve those responsible?

The origins of the Anglo-Zulu War, like many other wars, were simple, but the fighting – bloody, difficult and lasting much longer than anticipated – and the conclusion and extraction were much more complicated than planned. Disraeli's government had reluctantly supported the war, without expressly authorising it. As ever, there was increasing exasperation with escalating costs and the length of the campaign.

Europe's seafaring nations had a strong interest in the Cape as it provided the ideal base for ships sailing between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. South Africa was a convenient and benign staging post for ships rounding the Cape. The Dutch were the first settlers but, in the seventeenth century, had made little effort to colonise further inland and were content merely to grow enough crops and manage water systems to provide for the various fleets. Amid the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars, the British, nervous of French expansion and influence, seized the Cape by force. By the early 1800s, the Dutch settlers, augmented by other refugees such as the Huguenots and unprepared to accept the shackles of British administration, pushed inland to set up their own largely farming communities. In the 1830s, the Great Trek, as it became known, was relatively haphazard and raised tensions and animosity with the local tribes through whose territory it crossed and on which the Boers settled. British authority was left, effectively, on the coast in an uneasy relationship with the settlers. From 1820 onwards, the British had encouraged large numbers of people to settle in the Eastern Cape and this increased demand for expansion into what many thought, incorrectly, were the empty lands of the Veldt. In Natal, north and east of the Cape, the legendary Zulu chief, Shaka, established a powerful warlike tribe which, inevitably, came into conflict with the Boers. The British formally colonised Natal in 1843, pushing the settlers even further inland. Uneasy local treaties were formed with the Zulus and other tribes. The latter sometimes took the opportunity to break from the Zulu yoke and side with the British. In essence, the British kept a presence in South Africa because of the sea route. There was very little wealth to be extracted from the colony and the government in Whitehall merely desired a quiet and uncomplicated life with South Africa.

This changed dramatically in 1867 with the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley. At once, British eyes opened to visions of unbelievable wealth and profit. A loose confederation of the various states, such as the Transvaal and Orange Free State, under British rule suddenly became attractive and, in 1877, this was declared in Pretoria, to the disgust and confusion of the Boers. It was not difficult to see that, in addition to alienating the Dutch, the British were going to go head to head with the Zulus in their northern Natal kingdoms. A confrontation with the new king, Cetshwayo, was inevitable. The British administration in South Africa anticipated a quick success with a modern army against spear-carrying savages, followed by a leisurely peace in which to sort out the difficulties. As history has so often demonstrated, it does not always work like that. After the British issued a deliberately unacceptable ultimatum to the Zulus in December 1878, the Anglo-Zulu War began in January 1879.

The British commander for this swift action was Lieutenant General Lord Chelmsford. He was a professional soldier with experience in the Crimea, the Indian Mutiny and Abyssinia in 1868. Despite that, he was not an innovative military thinker and, as generals are sometimes criticised for doing, he tended to fight today's battles with the last war's tactics. Having overcome the weak Xhosa tribes relatively easily, he was overconfident when dealing with the Zulus. Chelmsford failed to gather sufficient intelligence on the Zulus' modus operandi, their strengths or whereabouts. He had to rely on an inadequate, and indifferently trained, force of a mixture of British soldiers, volunteer horsemen and locally raised native militia. Coupling these defects with a severe misjudgement of his own and a superbly and courageously orchestrated Zulu attack, the result was the disaster at Isandlwana where 1,300 of Chelmsford's men were killed, a third of his effective force. The outstanding defence of Rorke's Drift immediately following this defeat was probably the only thing that saved Chelmsford from dismissal. The effect at home was devastating and Chelmsford was frantically reinforced with virtually all that he asked for. Among these reinforcements appeared Louis Napoléon Bonaparte and Lieutenant Jahleel Brenton Carey of the 98th Regiment of Foot.

Napoléon Eugène Louis Jean Joseph, the Prince Imperial of France, was born in Paris on 16 March 1856. He was the son of Napoleon III, emperor of France, the third son of Louis Bonaparte, king of Holland in the time of his brother, the great emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. The prince's mother was Eugénie Marie de Guzman, younger daughter of the Spanish Count de Montijo and his Scottish wife, Donna Maria Kirkpatrick. As both his parents spoke English well and his nurse was English, it was not difficult for him to acquire the language fluently. When he was 14, the Franco-Prussian War broke out and, on 19 July 1870, dressed in the uniform of a *sous-lieutenant*, he rode out with his father, who was to take personal command of the French forces. On 2 August, he had his first experience of battle at the skirmish of Saarbrücken. The war, however, was short-lived and Napoleon III surrendered to the Prussians on 2 September. The emperor was taken prisoner of war and Eugénie and Louis sought sanctuary in England. Napoleon was soon released by the Prussians and joined his wife and son at Chislehurst in Kent where they were befriended by Queen Victoria. Given Prince Albert's natural antipathy to the Bonapartes (he was a Coburg) and British Francophobia, this was difficult to understand, particularly as Victoria still firmly endorsed the views of her husband, although he had been dead for eighteen years. One can only put it down to Victoria's very firm views on the sanctity of the European monarchies, whose crowned, or nearly crowned, heads were, in many cases, her relations. Many people regarded Napoleon III at best as a lightweight fop, and at worst, an inadequate upstart, but, nevertheless, there were those who had some sympathy for his predicament.

In 1872, to his great delight, Louis became an officer cadet at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. Woolwich then trained officers for the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers, while Sandhurst trained the cavalry and infantry. Napoleon Bonaparte himself had started life in the artillery, so what could be more appropriate for his great-nephew? Louis was extrovert and energetic and engaged in outlandish bouts of skylarking and showing off. Was this to compensate for his rackety upbringing and very uncertain and ambiguous future? With no actual commission in the British Army, despite his education at Woolwich, he could not command troops nor fill a post on the staff. What was he to do? The Establishment had made a serious problem for itself. He must

have carried considerable psychological baggage. Dr Adrian Greaves, the historian and consultant clinical psychologist, clearly explains:

> I believe Louis was destined from birth to become a neurotic extrovert. At first sight, this might indicate him to be a gregarious, flamboyant risk-taker keen to impress. He may well have appeared to everyone as such but in psychological terms, he had serious and destructive psychological problems…An extrovert is one who 'shows out' behaviour in order to make up for under-arousal, usually as a child. Children who are controlled or repressed, frequently because they have suffered the controlling influence of the parental 'learning curve' need, in teens and onwards, to express themselves to make up this deficiency. It is common for adventurers and 'high flyers' to come from strict families and many are the first born; subsequent siblings are more relaxed as their parents settle into parenthood.
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> The Prince Imperial certainly fits the criteria for classification as both a neurotic and an extrovert. His parents reared and educated him with one role in mind, to become the future Emperor of France. Sadly for Louis, exile to England severely curtailed this process leaving him a victim and with every need to re-prove himself. It is no wonder that he employed his inner childhood tactics of showing off to gain credibility.

Was this the reality behind his application to the commander-in-chief, the Duke of Cambridge, to serve in South Africa? It cannot have been through any 'political' thoughts of his own, which, if anywhere, would have directed him towards his own country's interests in Austria and the Balkans. No, it was clearly a desire to prove himself, coupled with his romantic nature and sense of destiny. He needed to taste his own 'whiff of grapeshot'. The Anglo-Zulu War contained the required spice of danger with, for him, no international complications. But for the Commander-in-Chief, what was the Prince Imperial actually going to *do*? Perhaps some nice little sinecure could be arranged, tucked away in Chelmsford's headquarters, well out of harm's way? With the tacit approval of Queen Victoria, the Duke overcame Disraeli's refusal to allow the Prince to go with the understanding that the boy was to be

there in a private capacity with no official standing. Disraeli was apoplectic but Cambridge had slipped it past the Queen and rid himself of a minor, but potentially major, irritation. The Duke wrote to Sir Bartle Frere, the high commissioner in South Africa:

> I am anxious to make you acquainted with the Prince Imperial, who is about to proceed to Natal by tomorrow's packet to see as much as he can of the coming campaign in Zululand in the capacity of a spectator. He was anxious to serve in our army having been a cadet at Woolwich, but the government did not think that this could be sanctioned; but no objection is made to his going out on his own account, and I am permitted to introduce him to you and to Lord Chelmsford in the hope, and with my personal request, that you will give him every help in your power to enable him to see what he can. I have written to Chelmsford in the same effect. He is a charming young man, full of spirit and energy, speaking English admirably, and the more you see of him, the more you will like him. He has many young friends in the artillery, and so I doubt not, with your and Chelmsford's kind assistance, will get through well enough.

This was the first of the buck-passing exercises, which were going to be so useful later.

The Prince reached Durban on 31 March 1879 and, accompanying Lord Chelmsford, moved with the headquarters to Pietermaritzburg. On 8 May, Chelmsford reached Utrecht and the Prince was placed under Colonel Harrison, the assistant quartermaster general (AQMG) who was responsible for the administration of the command. Far from being tucked away as the Duke of Cambridge wished, however, Louis was allowed out on patrol.

We must now turn to the other main player in the drama, Lieutenant Jahleel Brenton Carey. He was born in Leicestershire on 18 July 1847, the son of a parson. Interestingly, he was educated for much of his early life in France. He could, of course, speak fluent French and had adopted many French mannerisms and perceptions, which was subsequently to

his advantage in his relationship with the Prince Imperial. On graduation from Sandhurst, he was commissioned into the West India Regiment, at the time serving in Sierra Leone. 'Colonial' regiments such as these were unpopular in military circles and lacked cachet and sophistication. However, officers could live on their pay while others in 'smarter' regiments, based at home, required a private income. Foreign service, such as with Carey's regiment and those regiments of the Indian Army, also provided a good quality of life and the opportunity for advancement through distinguished service in 'small wars'.

Such a small war occurred in 1867 in Honduras, to which Carey's battalion had been sent to deal with friction between the settlers engaged in logging and the local population. In one action, a British patrol under Major Mackay was badly ambushed, which resulted in a rout for the security forces. Major Mackay was duly censured but Carey, who had been instrumental in covering the withdrawal of the unlucky force, emerged with a good deal of credit. There appeared to be no doubt as to his personal courage. Carey had clearly adopted a professional approach to his career which, in some circles, was disdained by those who thought they could succeed by mere amateurism.

Carey returned to England in 1870 suffering from the debilitating effects of service in the fever-ridden swamps of Central America, married and settled down to a solid career. Particularly devastating for him, though, was when he was placed on 'half-pay'. This was a sort of semi-redundancy whereby the government could reduce the officer corps but maintain a hold over them for future expansion if needed. To someone of Carey's financial means and newly married this was a real blow. However, with the onset of the Franco-Prussian War, he volunteered for service with the English Ambulance. Speaking French, he emerged with a decoration for 'his conduct in the relief of French wounded'. With this behind him he was able to obtain a commission in the 81st Regiment of Foot, with a subsequent transfer into the 98th, then stationed in the West Indies, his familiar haunt.

In 1878, he passed the Staff College course well and quickly volunteered for service in South Africa. He travelled out with a draft of reinforcements on the SS *Clyde*. As bad luck would have it, the *Clyde* was holed on a sandbar 3 miles offshore, unpleasantly close to where